DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 182 689 CS 005 280

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TITLE The Multiple Roles of Reading in Secondary Content-Area Instruction.
PUB DATE 79
NOTE 7p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Reading Conference (29th, San Antonio, TX, November 29-December 1, 1979)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Classroom Environment; Classroom Observation Techniques; *Content Reading; *Reading Habits; Reading Instruction; *Reading Materials; Reading Research; Secondary Education; *Student Teacher Relationship; Study Skills; *Time

ABSTRACT

Videotapes of eight high school classes were analyzed to determine patterns in the reading activities, materials, and instruction in secondary content area classes. The analysis included a summary of the language arts involved, the duration of specific instructional segments and their percentage of the total class time, and apparent patterns in the use of print. Although print was present for 72% of all class time, students were reading in the conventional sense only 10% of the time. For the remaining time that print was available, use of print appeared to cluster into five main categories: cuing responses, reinforcing oral presentations, structuring the teacher's presentation, correcting assignments, and copying. Because students infrequently read in class either to learn or to review information, there was little opportunity to observe teachers introducing or following up on reading assignments. There also was little evidence that students were developing mature reading and study skills in these classes. (RL)

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THE MULTIPLE ROLES OF READING IN SECONDARY CONTENT-AREA INSTRUCTION

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A paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Reading Conference, San Antonio, Texas, November, 1979.

Although reading classes p.ay an important role in reading instruction in junior and senior high schools, many experts have argued that developmental reading skills should be taught as an integral part of content-area instruction (see, for example, Herber, 1978, and Smith, et al., 1978). While preservice and inservice courses in content-area reading abound, there is a paucity of data on content-area reading demands (Wolf & Greenewald, 1978), and there are no observational studies comparable to those for elementary reading instruction (see, for example, Durkin, 1978-79). The purpose of this study is to describe patterns in the reading activities, materials, and instruction in selected secondary content-area classes.

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Methods

During the spring of 1979, approximately 300 teachers in western Wisconsin were asked to participate in a videotape study of content-area communication. Of the 14 volunteers, eight were selected for study. Each of these teachers was observed on five occasions over a six-week period. Teachers were not told the dates of the tapings, although they did know which group of students would be observed. Interviews were conducted with the teachers after all the data had been collected.

The teachers and their students were observed in the following classes: 7th grade language arts, 7th grade life science, 8th grade physical science, 8th grade math, 10th grade English, 11th grade English, 10-12th grade beginning Spanish, and 10-12th grade industrial arts. The teachers averaged 11.5 years of teaching experience.

The third tape for each teacher was analyzed for this study. For each of the eight videotapes, which averaged 40.9 minutes in length, a detailed log was prepared which divided the class into instructional segments. In one class with three instructional segments, for example, the teacher handed out test papers in segment one and gave directions for the test in segment two. In segment three, the students took the tests. The logs included a description of each segment, a summary of the language arts involved, and the duration of the segment. The logs were analyzed in two ways: (1) percentages of time use were calculated, and (2) patterns in the use of print were described.

Results and Conclusions

On the average, print was present for 22% of all class time. On the surface this suggests that reading was the most important form of communication in these classes. But analysis of the instructional logs

indicates that this conclusion would be invalid. Students were reading in the conventional sense of using print to learn or review information in only two classes. In one class students read an article silently, and in other they briefly reviewed a short story in their textbook before taking a quiz. Such conventional reading occurred for only 10% of all class time. Although this figure may appear low, it is somewhat higher than the 2.3% observed in a previous audiotape study of six teachers observed on four occasions each (Wolf & Greenewald, 1979).

For the remaining 60% of the time that print was available to students, use of print appeared to cluster into five main categories: cuing responses, reinforcing oral presentations, structuring the teacher's presentation, correcting assignments, and copying.

Print was used primarily to cue student or teacher responses in four classes. In one class, for example, students wrote answers to test questions they read, and in another class students and the teacher discussed an exercise on an overhead transparency. In none of these instructional segments did it appear that the print itself was to be learned. Instead students or the teacher were only expected to respond in some way to what had been read. Print cued responses for 25% of all class time.

In instructional segments in three classes print was used primarily to reinforce information that the teacher was presenting orally. In one class, for example, the teacher worked through homework problems orally, writing key calculations on an overhead transparency. In another class the teacher lectured to students and wrote terms and formulas on the blackboard. In all reinforcement segments, teachers did not write anything that they did not also tell to students, and print was used primarily for redundancy. Print reinforced oral presentations for 9% of all class time.

In two classes print appeared primarily to structure teachers' oral presentations. In one class, the teacher had written a list of approximately 50 terms on the board which he used as an outline in a lecture/discussion review for a test. In the second, the teacher had students open their textbooks; he read subheadings and sentences aloud and used them as a point of departure to lecture on the material. Print structured teacher presentations for 18% of all class time.

Print appeared to serve two other purposes. In two classes, students read worksheets or tests to correct them for a total of 8% of all class time. In another class students read in order to copy information from the board for a total of 1% of all class time.

Because students infrequently read in class either to learn or to review information, there was little opportunity to observe teachers introducing or following up on reading assignments. The one teacher who allocated most of her class time to silent reading of an article previewed its contents and set purposes for students. Just before class ended students discussed the main points in the article. A second teacher introduced a few minutes of silent reading with the more general purpose of reviewing the story for a quiz. After the bell rang at the end of class, a third teacher assigned students pages to read for homework. Interviews with the eight teachers indicated that three of them regularly assigned 15-30 minutes of reading for homework, but there was no way in this study to determine if the reading was actually done, and if so, how it was handled by students.

There was little evidence that students were developing mature reading and study skills in these classes. Students took notes in only one class without an explicit direction to do so, and no reading or study skills were explicitly taught.

Implications

This study suggests that the concept of reading in the content areas may require modification: students infrequently read in the conventional sense of processing extended discourse, and content teachers did not generally teach or reinforce reading/study skills. The conclusions suggest several questions for future research: (1) Why do teachers incorporate so little extended discourse into their instruction? (2) Which strategies used by content teachers are most effective in promoting student learning? (3) How is the reading process affected when print is presented in conjunction with lecture, discussion, writing, or performance activities?

Both large-scale and indepth studies are recommended. Large-scale studies requiring the use of observation schedules allow for comparisons between many different classes but obscure the details of instruction. Small-scale studies of necessity focus on just a few classrooms, but allow for intensive investigation of the relationship between the content and the forms of communication that are being used to present it.

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